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(1857-1947)

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SOME DOCUMENTS DEALING WITH "DIFFERENCES" BETWEEN THE CONGRESS AND THE BIHAR KISAN SABHA

Arvind Narayan Das, Poona

The term "differences" has been euphemistically used for "split" so often in Indian politics, that the real seriousness of such an occurrence is not obvious without going to the original documents of the period. In 1937-38, there occurred one such "difference" between the premier political party of India, the Indian National Congress, and the principal mass organisation of the peasants, the All-India Kisan Sabha. An examination of some of the original documents dealing with the episode shows that the "difference" reached the dimensions of a "split" in the case of the relationship between Bihar Provincial Congress Committee and the local Kisan Sabha.

The Background

Before considering the documents, however, it is necessary to briefly go into the background of the two organizations and their relationship. The Bihar Provincial Congress Committee, a motley collection of various class interests, was distinguished from such bodies in other Provinces by the fact of the pre-eminent position held in it by one individual, Babu Rajendra Prasad, who had acquired the position of Mahatma Gandhi's Viceroy in Bihar.[2] The well known ability of Dr. Prasad to compromise various mutually conflicting interests had helped him achieve this position. On the other hand, the Bihar Kisan Sabha was formed in 1929 by a group of Congress workers who, in spite

of having tried to make it reflect the colour of the political leadership of the Congress,[3] could not prevent it from becoming a militant mass organisation whose interest necessarily clashed with that of the landlord element in the parent organisation. In many ways, the "lumpen" character of the Kisan Sabha's undisputed leader, Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, provoked conflict and, notwithstanding the attempts of the Congress national leadership to subdue this conflict, it reached a head in 1937-38. Congress leaders have generally tended to put the blame for this impasse on the Sabhaites. The facts revealed by the documents under examination speak otherwise.

The "differences" between the B.P.C.C. and the Kisan Sabha date almost from the founding of the latter organisation.[4] But, after the Lucknow session of the Congress, the "differences", which till then had been largely slurred over, were brought to the fore. By then, the Kisan Sabha leaders, Swami Sahajanand in particular, had started realizing that many of the Congress leaders of Bihar were either zamindars themselves or had strong links with feudal interests.[5] In 1936, Babu Rajendra Prasad efficiently manipulated the B.P.C. Working Committee to keep Sahajanand out of the Kisan Enquiry Committee set up by the Provincial Congress making the latter to reach the conclusion that with himself outside the committee "... the others would either be the stooges of zamindars, or, at best, interpreters."[6] (translation by the author). After that, it was not long that "differences" turned into a "split".

The episode

Soon after this, the Indian National Congress adopted the "Faizpur Agrarian Programme", on the basis of which it contested the 1937 elections and came into power in several States including Bihar. The acceptance of office by the Congress acted as the catalyst in clearing the till then amorphous nature of the relationship between it and the Kisan Sabha and expedited a show-down. The first step in this direction was taken, characteristically, by Jawaharlal Nehru. Never one to pause and reflect before calling anything a spade, he issued a statement on 10 July, 1937:

"... We find to-day all manner of strange people who have never had anything to do with the peasantry before, talking in terms of economic programmes and trying in their uncouth way to woo the peasantry. Even political reactionaries of the deepest dye discuss unctuously agrarian programmes.[7] This statement was obviously not worded to please the saffronclad Swami Sahajanand Saraswati.

Those interests in Bihar who were opposed to the Kisan Sabha were, however, not going to miss such a pronouncement and an opportunity to utilize it. An anonymous leaflet was issued immediately. It carried a photograph of "Rashtrapati Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru" and quoted him as having said:

"Often it has been seen that some people on not getting positions etc. in the Congress and on becoming angry due to personal reasons, form Kisan Sabhas and thus do personal and

improper things in the name of the Kisan Sabha. I cannot tolerate such things." (translation by the author)

Emboldened by the Congress President's approach, the anti-Kisan Sabha elements in Bihar started gunning for Sahajanand and his associates with vigour. Alongside, the Swami's organisation launched a campaign to bring pressure on the Congress government in Bihar to urgently undertake land reforms and rent-reduction measures. Huge demonstrations were held at Patna on 23 August, 1 September, and 19 and 26 November, 1937 and again in the summer of 1938. The ruling faction of the Congress alleged that in these meetings the slogan "Laththh hamara zindabad" (Long live our lathis) was used and people were incited to violence. A meeting scheduled for 15 July, 1938 was sought to be disrupted by imposing Section 144.[9] Also, in the period 1936-39, the Kisan Sabha launched and fought the famous Bakasht struggle in Monghyr and many other struggles in Shahabad, Saran, Darbhanga, Patna, Champaran etc.[10] These actions further incensed the ruling Congressmen.

The ire of Babu Rajendra Prasad, the Bihar Premier Srikrishna Singh etc. against Sahajanand and his associates was further aroused by the fact that the actions of the latter gravely endangered the Congress-zamindar agreement then being negotiated.[11] The Kisan Sabha reacted by its leader, Sahajanand, demanding:

"... a solemn reassurance and public declaration about the future programme of the Ministry in unequivocal terms so that we may be able to judge and ascertain the position in order to decide our future course of action which may not embarass the Ministers as far as possible."[12]

The subtle and not so subtle implications of the above were not missed by the zamindars. The Zamindar Sabhas of Lalganj and Muzaffarpur, for instance, passed a resolution registering its "fear" at the advance towards anarchy by the disturbance among the ryots caused by the violent propaganada of the Kisan Sabha and at the fact that the importance of our political organisation, the Congress, is in danger.[13] (translation and emphasis by the author). That their confidence in the Congress was justified was proved within ten days by a resolution passed by the B.P.C.C. condemning the so-called "cult of the danda" and enjoining upon all Congress workers to keep themselves aloof from such activities and, in accordance with the Congress policy, fight those who may be found indulging in them. It further impressed upon "such Congress members as are working in the Kisan Sabha that not only their active co-operation in such activities but also their passive association with them is improper." And it directed "the D.C.C.'s to keep an eye on these activities of its workers and to report them to the Provincial Congress Office."[14] The stage was set for a full-fledged "difference".

The "official" position of the Congress was underscored by the comments in Mahatma Gandhi's paper, Harijan, by Mr. Mahadev Desai, who praised the "friendly and conciliatory talks between the zamindars and the representatives of the Kisans" (sic), condemned the "growing body of opinion which

evidently considers the two interests (of the zamindars and Kisans) as wholly conflicting" and emphatically supported the B.P.C.C. action, which he described as "a warning to the sabha and its members that if they use the Congress name to promote internal feuds they will invite a ban on themselves."[15] Almost immediately, the zamindars in their newspapers and pamphlets started ridiculing the Kisan Sabha.[16] The stand of the Saran, Champaran and Monghyr D.C.C.s, which had imposed a ban on Swami Sahajanand from touring their districts,[17] seemed vindicated in the light of the endorsement from the very highest in the Congress, Babu Rajendra Prasad, and the Secretary of Mahatma Gandhi himself.

The Sabha leaders, like Jaya Prakash Narayan, on their side, condemned the actions of the D.C.Cs and the B.P.C.C.[18] and Swami Sahajanand decided to defy the ban.[19] Chandrashekhar Singh, a Kisan Sabha worker of Saran district, organised a series of 22 meetings which Sahajananad addressed. The official Congres opposed the meetings by organising black flag demonstrations, boycotts, the shouting of vulgar abuse and even physical confrontation. Disciplinary action was taken against Chandrashekhar Singh and others.[20] The charge of spreading "intellectual dissension" and violence was repeated again and again. The Kisan Sabha activists in Monghyr and other districts were "placed in a very embarrassing position. They are loyal and devoted Congressmen and do not want to go against the decisions of the Congress Committee.

At the same time they do not wish to give up the work of the Kisan Sabha, because they firmly believe that that work strengthens the Congress."[21] One Ramautar Ram, the Secretary of the Madhubani Town Congress Committee, was so confused that he wrote to Nehru asking him for a reply "in his own handwriting" advising on the proper course of action. A typed letter was sent in reply, neatly evading the issue: "As you know there has been some conflict in Behar between the Congress and the Kisan Sabha. In view of the peculiar position in Behar I cannot advise you and you should seek the advice of local leaders."[22] The very same local leaders who had precipitated the "conflict"! Faced with this situation, Sahajanand resigned from the B.P.C.C. Working Committee.[23] Jaya Prakash Narayan thundered, "The action of the Working Committee in Bihar seems to be a part of a nation-wide offensive that the Right-wing leaders of the Congress have launched upon the growing left. The Right-wing wants to divorce parliamentary activity from mass agitation and struggle. The Left is proving an obstacle. Hence this drive in the name of non-violence"[24] and warned the Congress that "it should not create another 1908 (Sic) Surat debacle" by provoking the Sabhaites "to part company with the Congress just as Lokmanya Tilak had done then."[25]

The matter went up to the Working Committee of the National Congress. "... Shri Rajendra Prasad placed before the Committee the situation created in the province by the activities of some of the members of the Kisan Sabha. He said that the utterances of the President of the Provincial Kisan

Sabha were also such as would lend support to violence."[26] A resolution, drafted in Jawaharlal Nehru's handwriting, was adopted. It stated "... The Congress has already fully recognised the right of Kisans and industrial workers to organise themselves in peasant unions or trade unions. Nevertheless it must be remembered that the Congress itself is in the main a kisan organisation. ... The Congress cannot associate itself with any activities which are incompatible with the basic principles of the Congress and will not countenance any of the activities of those Congressmen who as members of the Kisan Sabhas help in creating an atmosphere alien to Congress principles and activities and particularly leading to violence."[27] The breaking point was finally reached.

The beginning of the Second World War, the arrest of the main Kisan Sabha leaders and the resignation from office by the Congress Ministries, however, prevented what appeared to be the inevitable clash: whether it was inevitable or not is a matter of interpretation, which is outside the scope of this paper. The one thing that is clear is that the attempt by the Kisan Sabha leaders to form an independent economic and political organisation - independent of both the propertied classes and of the working class[28] - was doomed to failure, as the subsequent history of the Sabha unambiguously demonstrates.

The Documents

It is obvious that for an episode as recent as this and involving many well-known personalities, there will be a plethora of documents and other sources of evidence. The

task, therefore, is not so much to discover documents but to sort them out and to extract the relevant information from them. This is not to say that the information is readily available. The documents used for the purpose of this paper are mainly concerned with the political activities of the Congress Party and as such contain information about agrarian problems only incidentally.

As has been mentioned (cf. n.1) the unpublished documents used were found among the Jawaharlal Nehru Papers in the Nehru Museum Library and the Rajendra Prasad Papers, copies of which have been acquired from the Indian Council of Historical Research. In the collection of Nehru Papers, there are some letters written to him by various people in Bihar and elsewhere dealing with the Congress-Kisan Sabha "differences". The most important among these are Swami Sahajanand's undated letter written to the President, Indian National Congress (cf. n. 17). Chandrashekhar Singh's letter to Nehru (cf. n. 20) and Pandit Ramnandan Mishra's letter to Dr. Rajendra Prasad (cf. n. 21) substantiate many of the points made in Sahajananad's letter and give the Kisan Sabha side of the dispute. The papers in the Rajendra Prasad Collection (cf. n. 11) and Dr. Prasad's letter to Nehru (cf. n. 14) set forth the views of the leadership of the B.P.C.C. and the details of the Congress-zamindar agreement. From the anonymous pamphlet casting aspersions on the Kisan Sabha (cf. n. 8) and the resolution of the Lalganj Zamindar Sabha (cf. n. 13) some idea can be got of the opinion of the zamindars and from the papers dealing with the Congress Working Committee meeting (cf. n. 26) - the draft, the adopted resolution et al - of the position of

the A.I.C.C. Ramautar Ram's letter to Nehru and his reply thereto (cf. n. 22) and Nehru's noting on the back of the anonymous pamphlet mentioned above throw interesting sidelights on the episode and on the persons involved in this.

These unpublished documents are in manuscript or typewritten form, being mostly private letters. But, as private letters can never give a complete picture of public events in the period when mass media dealing with the same events exist simultaneously, published books and newspaper reports have also to be taken into consideration.

Finally, in the case of events as recent as this, there are a number of participants who are alive but whose involvement in or judgement of them has not been recorded. Personal interviews with them provide a great deal of very valuable information and they are particularly helpful in the process of interpretation. Unfortunately, in this instance, except for Mr. Hare Krishna Konar, the present General Secretary of the All India Kisan Sabha, all other people interviewed have desired to remain anonymous.

NOTES

1. The period covered by the paper is 1936-39, but the main events occurred in 1937-38. In reconstructing those events, use has been made of both published and unpublished material. The former include some of the writings of Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, which, though published, are not easily available. The unpublished documents used are mainly of two categories : (i) the Rajendra Prasad Papers preserved in the National Archives of India, copies of which have been obtained by the State Legislature Unit of the Indian Council of Historical Research and (ii) A.I.C.C. Files, covering correspondence etc. on the Kisan and workers' struggles, preserved in the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. The accuracy of some of the facts found in the above papers was verified in the course of personal interviews with present Kisan Sabha leaders in Calcutta. The documents have been described later in the paper.

2. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Mera Jeevan Sangharsh, Patna, 1952, (hereinafter referred to as S 1), p. 466. Bihar was referred to as "Rajan Babu's benami suba".

3. Swami Sahajanand Saraswati, Kisan Sabha Ke Sansmaran, Allahabad, 1947 (?), (hereinafter referred to as S2), p.16.

4. S1. p. 339.

5. Ibid., p. 478.

6. S2, p. 135.

7. Nripendra Nath Mitra (ed.), The Indian Annual Register, Jan-June, 1937, Vol. I, Calcutta, 1937, pp. 224-230.

8. Pamphlet filed in AICC File No. G-98, 1937, Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi. On the back of the pamphlet, there is a noting in Jawaharlal Nehru's handwriting "Placards against B.P. Sinha, Surya Nandan Thankur by zamindar using my name re Propaganda that the socialist and Kisan Sabha people running against Congress candidates".

9. S1, p. 502.

10. Ibid., p. 511.

11. Papers in the National Archives of India belonging to the Dr. Rajendra Prasad Collection. F.No.III/37, Col.No.1, Item No.16.

12. Statement of Sahajanand, AICC File G-28, 1937, p. 187.

13. Resolution of the Lalganj Zamindar Sabha, dated 4 December, 1937, ibid.

14. Rajendra Prasad's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, dated Ziradei, 18 December, 1937, Enclosure, ibid.

15. Quoted in Amrit Bazar Patrika, Calcutta, 24 December, 1937.

16. Pandit Chhabinath Pandey, Kisan Sabhawalon Ka Hasyaspad Krodh," Navashakti," Patna, 25 December, 1937.

17. Sahajanand's letter to the President, Indian National Congress, undated, AICC File, op.cit.

18. Amrit Bazar Patrika, 19 (?) December 1937.

19. All-India Kisan Bulletin, Bombay, 24 (?) December, 1937.

20. Chandrashekhar Singh's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru, dated Patna, 5 January, 1938, AICC File, op.cit.

21. Sahajanand's letter to President, INC. Also Ramnandan Mishra's letter to Rajendra Prasad, dated Laheriasarai, 17 January, 1938, ibid.

22. Ramautar Ram's letter to Jawaharlal Nehru and reply thereto, AICC File No.G-32, 1938.

23. Cf. Note 21 above.

24. Amrit Bazar Patrika, op.cit.

25. Indian Annual Register, July-Dec., 1938.

26. AICC File No.42, 1936; Working Committee Proceedings, Minutes 1936-38, 29 December, 1936 to 25 February 1938.

27. Ibid.

28. S2, pp. 18-49.

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AGRARIAN MOVEMENT IN RAJASTHAN

(A Description of Some Unknown Source Material)

Dr. Ram Pande, Jaipur

The agrarian movement in Rajasthan has not been paid adequate attention by the scholars. The source materials for the topic is so vast that it cannot be covered within the narrow limits of the paper like this. However, I have tried to give a complete information in brief.

The nature of land-holdings in Rajasthan was unique and distinct in many ways from the nature of land-holdings in other parts of the country. The holdings belonged to the local kings, the jagirdars, zamindars and the kisans (peasants), respectively. The peasants were not the owners of the land but were only the tenants. They were subjected to heavy taxation, which were devised in many ways. On the whole a peasant was subjected to 86 different kinds of taxes.

The agrarian movement in Rajasthan may be dated from Bijolia[1] unrest. The peasants of the place had been agitating since 1913 against the inequitable taxes, forced labour, acts of injustice and imposition of heavy land revenue. The agitation was led by a Sadhu, Baba Sitaram Das till Bijai Singh Pathik, who settled down in Bijolia, assumed the

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1. Bijolia, a place now in Bhilwara district was a premier jagir of former State of Udaipur. This is situated about 30 miles South-West of Bundi in the Aravali Ranges.

command of the agitation. The Memoirs of Baba Sitaram Das[2] are very good source about the peasants conditions. The serious and pitiful conditions of the Kisans compelled the Sadhu to defy the State and Thikana authorities. The year 1916 was a very bad year for Bijolia, for, monsoon had practically failed and so also the crops. Even then the Thikana authorities with the help of the State Police tried to collect the revenue alongwith the war fund.[3] Peasants under the leadership of Bijai Singh Pathik rose in rebellion. The matter was referred to the Resident, who ordered the Munsif to arrest Pathik and sent him to Udaipur. But the Munsif who was in collusion with Pathik allowed him to escape. Now leadership was assumed by Shri Manik Lal Verma alongwith others, while Pathik conducted the movement from the eastern boundary of Mewar.[4] Thikana authorities tried to supress the movement by oppressive methods. Mr. Trench, the Settlement Officer, even ordered firing in villages of Raita and Tilasman where many people fell victims to the bullets, but this strengthened the movement. This has been well depicted in the Memoirs of Late Shri Manik Lal Verma.[5]

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2. Baba Sitaram Das Ke Samsamaran MS. are available at State Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner and also at the office of Shodhak, a research digest, Jaipur.

3. Abhudaya 8-4-1916 talks of general drought in Rajasthan.

4. Hindustan Times 25-5-1927.

5. Manik Lal Verma Ke Samsamaran available at Rajasthan Archives, Bikaner and with Mrs. Narayani Devi M.P. widow of late Shri Manik Lal Verma at 219 North Avenue, New Delhi.

Bajai Singh Pathik along with others attended the Congress Session of 1918, where he became very intimate with late Shri Ganesh Shankar Vidyarthi, the Editor of the Pratap who strongly supported the cause of Bijolia, by writing an article on it. Bijai Singh Pathik also wrote some articles in the Pratap regarding Bijolia Movement. B.G.Tilak was also impressed by Bijai Singh Pathik, and, Tilak's Paper, the Maratha[7] made Bijolia movement very popular in the country. Information about this movement is also available in other contemporary news-papers.[8] Few geets were composed to encourage the peasants. Manik Lal Verma's Panchira[9], Bijai Singh Pathik's lok geets[10], Bhanwar Lal Swarnkar's[11] songs and Prem Chand's[12] geets are important, as these represent the sufferings of the kisans.

The Kisans appointed their own Panchayats to look after the matters of daily administration including crop affairs. Thus Thikana administration was paralysed. Ultimately the

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6. Pratap (Kanpur) issues for 1913 to 1940-41 available at Saraswati Library Fatehpur Shekhawati a place about 90 miles towards west of Jaipur City.

7. Maratha (Marathi) available at Fatehpur.

8. Arjun, Navyug Sandesh, Tyag Bhumi Vishal Bharat, Young Rajasthan, Princely India available at Fatehpur and Bombay Chronicle, 9-2-1921

9. Manik Lal Verma's Panchira available at the office of the Shodhak, Jaipur.

10. Bijai Singh Pathik's geets, compilation is available with Smt. Janki Devi Pathik widow of Shri Pathik, teacher in a Local Girls School at Mathura.

11. Bhanwarlal Swarnkar's songs are available at the office of the Shodhak, Jaipur.

12. Prem Chand's geets were more popular, people still remember

authorities yielded and a settlement took place in 1922. Accordingly, "Small lags (Customary dues) shall not be paid and begar (unpaid forced labour) shall not be extorted, except in the case of the State Chief ~~xfxkkxxxkkxkx~~ to which the people agreed". The first battle was won. The settlement and references are well depicted in Government records like, Foreign Political Proceedings, Fortnightly Reports, Settlement Reports etc., Government records available at National Archives of India, New Delhi and Bijolia Sambandhi Kagiats available at the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

Bijolia movement pioneered new movement. The agitation of the peasants even after 1922 was continued in Mewar, Bundi and Sirohi. Amet[13] and Sirohi Bhils revolted against the disparity of the taxes under Motilal Tejawat, who was finally put behind the bars and was released in 1936. Motilal Tejawat's Atam Katha[14] is the main and important source material for the incident. This reveals that a Kisan Sammelan was organised at Barisal[15] under the Chairmanship of Motilal Tejawat. This Sammelan prepared a big memorandum named Mewar Pukar and presented it to the Raja, but all in vain. Abhudaya[16] a contemporary weekly newspaper published from Prayag is also a very good source regarding the Bhil movement of Amet and Sirohi. Government records are Fortnightly Reports, Foreign Political Proceedings, Home Political Proceedings, available at the National Archives of India and Bijolia Sambardhi Kagjat at the Rajasthan State Archives, Bikaner.

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13. A place in Udaipur.
14. Motilal Tejawat wrote his Memoirs in his Atam Katha, Ms. available at Hindi Sahitya Mandir, Jodhpur.
15. A place in Udaipur.
16. Abhudaya, 15.4.1922, 22.4.1922, 3.6.1922 issues are important and are available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi. Abhudaya's issues of 15.7.1922 and 22.7.1922 have also published the answer of Sirohi ruler clarifying about Bhil subjection in Sirohi.

In Bundi it took a different turn. Meetings were held to protest against several inequitable taxes, specially the war fund which was collected an anna per rupee on revenue. The kisan movement was organised under the leadership of Shri Mendu Ram Sharma. Abhudaya[17] is only source which gives the fullest information on the incident besides Government records. Some sketchy inferences are in Motilal Tejawat's Atam Katha.[18]

Parsoli,[19] Mandesra[20] and Begu[21] in Mewar (Udaipur) faced a serious oppression at the hands of the British, where many villages were set on fire. Even women and children were not spared by French in Govindpura (Begu), where a meeting of Kisan Sabha was fixed. Sources on the Begu affairs are Memoirs of the leaders like Haribhai Kinkar,[22] Ram Narayan Choudhary[23]; Durga Prasad Choudhary,[24] Arjun Lal Sethi,[25] and Rupaji Kirpaji Dhakar,[26] Later's Memoirs are most important as he was directly involved in the affair. Besides this, contemporary newspapers like Bombay Chronicle[27], Daily Express[28] and Pioneer[29] also supply good information and represent public opinion.

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17. Abhudaya's issue of 10.6.1922 is most important and available at the National Archives of India, New Delhi.
18. Atamkatha of Motilal Tejawat Op.Cit.
19. Parsoli is a place in Chittor District.
20. Mandesra is now in Chittor District.
21. Begu was also a premier Jagir of Udaipur now a place in Chittor District.
22. Memoirs of Haribhai Kinkar available at Shodhak's Office, Jaipur.
23. Memoirs of Ram Narayan Choudhary are available with him at Palbichla Ajmer.
24. Memoirs of Durga Prasad Choudhary are published in Navjyoti 15 August, 1973.
25. Arjun Lal Sethi's Memoirs are available with Sethi's family at Jaipur.
26. Memoirs of Rupaji Kripaji Dhakar are available at Shodhak's office, Jaipur.
27. Bombay Chronicle, 9.2.27.
28. Daily Express 16.2.1922. Cuttings are available at B.Vidyamandir Shodh Pritisthan Bikaner.

The British Government of India for economic exploitation arranged costly imports. This necessitated increase in the land revenue and other taxes, which was done under cover of new revenue settlements in almost every State. The result of these enhanced taxes was that the troubles broke out again in 1925 in different States. The most tragic was the agitation in Neemuchana,[30] a Thikana in the former State of Alwar. Quite a few small jagirdars felt hard hit by the enhanced rates of revenue collection but it was the Thakur of Neemuchana who openly defied the decision of the Government. As a result of which army was called in and consequence of its firing 150 lives were lost and the entire village was destroyed. Information about this is supplied by two contemporary news papers, Princely India[31] and Tarun Rajasthan.[32] Another centre of trouble in the same year was the Jaipur State, where in Khetri and Sikar, the peasants, who were mostly Jats, rose in rebellion. The movement was conducted by Ram Narain Choudhary in the rural areas while Baba Narsingh Dass led the movement in Jaipur City. Full information regarding this movement may be obtained from the Private Papers of Shri Ram Narain Choudhary[33] and the Memoirs left by late Baba Narsingh Das.[34]

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30. Neemuchana a town in Alwar District.
31. Princely India - 16.8.32 (sic) available at Saraswati Library, Fatehpur.
32. Tarun Rajasthan available at Fatehpur.
33. Private Papers of Shri Ram Narain Choudhary are available at Palbichla Ajmer.
34. Memoirs of Narsingh Das were named by him as Rajasthan Ki Pukar (Rajasthan Archives, Bikaner).

In 1927 Bijolia re-appeared on the scene, when the Jagirdar of the place increased taxes ignoring agreement of 1922.[35] Bijai Singh Pathik who formed Rajasthan Seva Sangh and was its Chairman, was not in a position to render any direct help to the kisans as he was under prohibitory orders to enter Mewar. Thus Haribhau Upadhyaya was sent. Shri Haribhau Upadhyaya had an interview with the Maharana and effected a settlement. Accordingly kisans agreed to pay arrears while the State agreed to abolish all the extra taxes and to restore land to its original owners. Besides Government records, the memoirs of late Shri Haribhar Upadhyaya[36] constitute the source material for the second phase of Bijolia Movement.

In 1932 Kisan movement in Shekhawati was organised under Jat Kisan Sabha. In 1934 about 2000 peasants marched to Jaipur to interview the Maharaja and to put their demands and grievances[37] before him. By 1936 Jat Kisan Sabha of Sikar

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35. Bombay Chronicle 27.5.1927.

36. Memoirs of Late Shri Haribhau Upadhaya are available at Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi under the Head Private Papers of Shri Haribhau Upadhyaya. In Haribhau Upadhyaya's Tyagbhumi, a newspaper published from Ajmer (in the issue of Asad Charkaram, Vikram Samvat 1986 (1929) all the details regarding the second phase of Bijolia Movement has been described. Shri Upadhyaya states that when he heard the miserable condition of about peasants in Bijolia he could not control himself, and broke down in tears.

37. The National Call 25.5.1934.

and Jhunjhunu[38] was re-organised by Pt. Tarkeshwar Sharma and was named as Kisan Sabha only. Pt. Tarkeshwar Sharma a native of Singhana[39] started a hand written newspaper titled Gram Samachar[40] through which he encouraged the agitation. However, by 1939 the agitation was crushed and leaders like Pt. Tarkeshwar Sharma, Hiralal Shastri, Deshraj[41], Baba Narsingh Dass etc., were either imprisoned or exiled from the State. Deshraj and Tarkeshwar Sharma reached Agra and from there they published a newspaper Ganesh[42] through which they continued the agitation. Most reliable source for this is the Memoirs of Shri Hira Lal Shastri[43] as he was one of the leading personalities of the former State of Jaipur and directly participated in the movement.

In 1945-46 Rajasthan witnessed another agrarian crisis at Dudhwa Khara and Rajgarh[44] in Bikaner State. Peasants rose in rebellion under the leadership of Pt. Magharam. Other leaders were Prof. Kedar Nath[45], Raghuwar Dayal Goel[46] and Kumbha Ram Arya[47],

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38. Sikar and Jhunjhunu, now are two separate districts in the modern Rajasthan. This region is known as Shekawati.
39. Singhana, a town in Jhunjhunu district about 20 miles South West from Jhunjhunu.
40. Gram Samachar's file for 1936-37 is available at Shodhak's office, Jaipur.
41. Deshraj was a Jat and belonged to the Jat State of Bharatpur, later on he wrote Jat Itihas.
42. Ganesh Available at Saraswati Library, Fatehpur.
43. Memoirs of Shri Hira Lal Shastri are preserved in the private paper collection section of Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, New Delhi.
44. Dhudwa Khara and Rajgarh are about 18 and 50 miles from Churu respectively.
45. Prof. Kedar Nath is an M.L.A., Rajasthan and resides at Jaipur.
46. Raghuwar Dayal Goel is an advocate and also has few papers like pamphlets, Court Arrest, Warrants etc.
47. Kumbha Ram Arya an M.P.(Rajya Sabha) narrated the story to the writer. Other important leaders were Sardar Har Lal Singh, Ladhu Ram Joshi and Ghasi Ram Choudhary.

though the Kisans were agitating since 1932 under the leadership of Chaudhary Hanuman Singh of Dudhwakhara.[48] The movement is well depicted in Bikaner ka Rajnaitik Jagran aur Pandit Magharam.[49] This is a compilation of facts, reports, proceedings of Praja Mandal etc. The newspaper Veer Arjun[50] is also a good source, where the Dudhwakhara's Kisans' view point, their difficulties and genuine demands are given in elaborate details.

All the troubles of agrarian nature of these States during preindependence times were not solved till the abolition of Zamindari and Jagirdari in Rajasthan in 1950.

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48. Lok Yuddha. files of 1946.

49. Bikaner ka Rajnitik Jagran Aur Pandit Magharam a copy was made available to me by Shri Satya Narain Pareek, Director Bhartiya Vidhya Mandir Shodh Pratishthan, Bikaner. Shodhak also possess a copy of it. Pt. Magharam's son Sri Ram Narain Sharma is a Municipal Counciller in Bikaner. He also possesses Private Papers of Pt. Magharam, files of Lokyudha Newspaper, Prajamandal records, pamphlets and some cuttings of Veer Arjun Paper.

50. Veer Arjun 22.12.1945.

AGRARIAN MOVEMENT IN ASSAM UP TO 1935

Dr. Pratap Chandra Choudhury, Gauhati

Before the passing of the Assam Tenancy Act of 1935 which marked a turning point in the history of the land tenure system in Assam, tenants had no remedy against the

P.T.O.

In preparing this article, the author had consultations with the Late Ganga Ram Choudhury, the then General Secretary of the Assam Talatiya Ryot Sabha, who not only furnished useful information on the subject but also handed over to me his personal Diary pertaining to the movement. I have also utilized the issues of the journal Assamiya (1918-1949) now defunct, but once a mouth piece of Assamese people, and other old Assamese journals namely Banti, Manasni, Marmabani, Avahan, Chetna and Banhi etc., besides published works and memoirs preserved in the Library of the Department of Historical and Antiquarian Studies, Assam, Gauhati.

oppression of the landholders. The Act came into being as a result of a strong movement in the shape of peasant's protest-meetings and representations made to the Government, by the peasants, seeking removal of their grievances. For understanding the historical necessity of the said movement, we are to examine the system that had been in vogue in this part of the Country during the days of Ahom Kings and the changes introduced in it by the British administrators.

Before the Burmese invasions and the Burmese invasions and the consequent occupation of certain parts of the State, Assam was ruled by the Ahoms for centuries. It was ceded to the British by the Burmese as a result of the Treaty of Yandaboo in 1826. The Burmese did not introduce any change in land administration as their chief motive was to ransack the country . Under the Ahom rulers the land constituted the absolute property of the sovereign. The 'ryots' who cultivated the land were but serfs. During their time the land tenure system was based on personal service.[1] The Ahom dministration employed every adult male in the service of the State either as a labourer or a soldier. He was registered as a Paik,[2] and four Paiks (later three Paiks) constituted a squad, known as got. The Paiks were required to serve the government in turn, and the normal duties of an

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1. Gazetteer of India, Assam State, Sibsagar District, Shillong: 1967. p.276.

2. With the exception of the nobles, priests and persons of high caste and their slaves, the whole male population between the age of fifteen and fifty were liable to render service to the State. They were known as Paiks.

absentee Paik in his village had to be performed by his Comrades. In return for his service each Paik was allowed 8 bighas of Rupit land in addition to his basti land, free of rent. Annaully he had to pay rupee one for the portion of land meant for his house and garden. Any land occupied in excess of this limit was assessed at 4 annas per bigha. In addition to this, each adult Paik had to pay a poll tax of one rupee.

On the annexation of Assam, by the British they allowed the system of land administration of the Ahoms to be continued for a few years, with the exception that the system of personal service was done away with. Each Paik or person was assessed a sum of Rs.3/- for his homestead, paddy field and garden. In 1832 a land tax was introduced in place of the poll tax in the plain Districts. Each district was divided into Mahals which were resettled annually upto the year 1835. The system of collection of land revenue, generally done through the agency of the commission agents, viz. Choudhuries, Mauzadars and Kakatis, was not uniform. All these preliminary changes in the existing land tenure system were made by David Scott, the First Commissioner of Revenue for Assam and Agent to the Governor General, North East Frontier, who [illegible] introduced not only revenue, but also, judicial reforms of a far reaching nature.

During 1836-42, the plan of settling a circle of villages, called mouzas, with Choudhuries or Mouzadars, for a short term of years, was started. But in 1854, the system

of annual settlement was re-introduced. The rate of assessment differed from District to District. This state of affairs prevailed upto 1870 when the rate of assessment was raised in all the five Districts of Kamrup, Darrang, Lakshimpur, Sibsagar and Nowgong, to rupee one per bigha for Basti land, ten annas per bigha for rupit land and eight annas per bigha for faringati land.[3] The system of land tenure prevailing in the State except Goalpara District which was a temporarily settled, is known as the Ryotwari-system or more appropriately as Mouzadari which was introduced in Assam proper after the passing of the Bengal Government Resolution of 19th October, 1870.

The introduction of the Ryotwari system was the result of the untiring efforts of the then Commissioner of Assam, Colonal Hopkinson. Under this system, Government dealt directly with the occupant cultivators and recognised no intermediate feudal class. Thus the foundation of the Ryotwari or Mouzadari system of tenure was laid. Although the aim of the Government was to eliminate the intermediate feudal class, but it could not achieve it wholly. The owners of Khirai (full revenue paying estates), Lakhiraj (full revenue free estate), Nisf-khiraj (half revenue paying estates), continued to sub-let their lands to tenants. Under this system the

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3. In the five upper districts of Brahmaputra Valley, the Soil was divided into three main classes basti, rupit and faringati. Basti was the land on which the ryot's house stood with garden enclosures around it. Rupit was the land on which the winter crop of transplanted rice (Sali) was grown, as well as the low swampy land devoted to the cultivation of bao. The term faringati denoted the soils producing ahu or summer rice, Sugarcane, mustard oil seed and other crops: Final Reports of the All India Soil Survey Scheme - The Indian Council of Agricultural Research, 1958. Pp.56-57.

land was divided into the categories of (1) Khiraj periodic (2) Khiraj annual, (3) Nisf-Khiraj or half free revenue paying estates, (4) Lakhiraj or full revenue free estates, (5) Free Simple Grant, (6) Special Settlement, and (7) Waste Land Grant for 30 years, 45 years and 99 years, as the case may be.

Under the said Land Revenue Regulation Mouzadars were vested with certain powers of the Deputy Commissioner, for the realisation of arrears in revenue, which generally made them corrupt. They could attach moveable property of the defaulting peasants and also move the Deputy Commissioner to annul or sell their estates. The Mouzadars, of course, could not attach immovable property. Thus it can be said that the system though looked very good from the point of collection of revenue, was not so in respect of improving the condition of the peasants.

Though in Assam, except Goalpara district, there was no Zamindary system, yet, as there were some big Nisf-Khiraj estates, owner of which and the Mouzadars, for all practical purposes, acted as, or became Zamindars themselves in view of the absence of any law to protect the interests of the cultivators. They, like Zamindars, also put the cultivators to great distress. With a very few exceptions, the aim of the majority of the landholders was to derive as much benefit as possible at the cost of the tenants. The owners of Debottar, Dharmattar/Pirpal and some other Brahmottar estates treated their tenants, in some cases at least, just like the

big landlords. The Parbatia Gossains[4], the descendants of the religious preceptors of the Ahom King, who were by far the biggest Brohmottar landholders, imposed on their tenants amounts, sometimes in cash and sometimes in kinds, in excess of the actual revenue on one pretext or the other viz. Seva, Puja, higher local rates, cost of rent receipts, grazing, etc. in accordance with the customs prevailing in Bengal. New tenants had to pay Selami, or makhchawani i.e. Nazrana or make advance payment, not to be deducted from revenue, in addition. Majority of the petty Brahmottar landholders usually followed the tactics of the Parbatia Gossains as far as possible. Some landholders who let out lands on cash rent wished their tenants to render service to them for a few days during festivals and seasons of sowing and harvesting. Others took to false measurements with rods shorter than the standard government pole of 8 cubits in length.

Such ill-dealings of the landholders and the revenue policy of the Government were at the roots of the agrarian movement in Assam. Consequently, in the sixties of the 19th century, agrarian movements, or uprisings were noticed in the form of Raij-Mel or Mels. The original village Panchayat transacting business on social matters, took over the role of popular assembly of the entire body of villagers for deciding and executing matters of common socio-economic interest.

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4. Krishnaram Bhattacharya was the first Parbatia Gossain because of the fact that he was first placed on the hillock of Kamakhya or Nilachala. The Ahom king Rudra Singha brought him from Malipota of Bengal to Assam by the year 1714 with the intention to become his disciple. But king Rudra Singh died before he became the disciple of Krishnaram. Rudra Singha's son and successor Siva Singh obeying the last wish of his father became the first disciple of Krishnaram.

The Raij-Mels aroused popular consiousness and confidence in the united strength of the peasants. In 1861 the peasants of Phulaguri area in the Nowgong District, mostly tribals, vehemently protested through their mels against the prohibition of poppy cultivation in that year and there were rumours of imposition of taxes on income and on areca nut and betle vine. As the authorities paid no heed to the sentiments of the people one English officer, Lt. Singer, a Junior Assistant Commissioner, lost his life in his attempt to suppress the demonstrations made by the people in October 1861 in resentment. With the help of the military the uprising, known as "Phulaguri Dhawa" was suppressed and some eight tribal leaders were subsequently punished with death or transportation for life.

Though the Phulaguri uprising was suppressed, the role of Mels could not be minimised. The revenue policy of the Government was a source of constant worry and apprehension to the people, because periodical enhancement of revenue was not based upon any sound statistical data. In 1868 the rate of revenue in the Assam Valley Districts was doubled. There was consequently great discontent amongst the people which found expression through their Raij Mels, especially in the Districts of Kamrup and Darrang. The police dispersed the popular gatherings by show of force in places like Bazali in Kamrup District and Patharughat in Darrang District. But suppression of popular uprisings by force here and there gave further momentum to such agitations through Mels which began to play more important role. The

"Assam Riots" of 1893-94 reveal the extent to which the Raij Mel gave a severe jolt to the Imperial Power. They made the people conscious of their state of degradation. The Mels were active in districts of Sibsagar, Nowgong, Darrang and Kamrup. In the District of Kamrup this movement acquired particular intensity in Rangiya and Lochima (Sarukhetri Mouza) and in Patharughat in Mangaldoi Sub-Division of Darrang District. The people voiced their protest against the unjust enhancement of land revenue by 70-80 per cent which was imposed in 1893 during the Chief Commissionership of Sir W.E. Ward, under the plea that the assessment of 1873had been lenient and that peoples' capacity to pay had not been fully taxed. In Kamrup the percentage of increase over the prevalent assessment was 54-58 per cent, the highest percentage being in Darrang, 60-79 per cent. It was natural that Kamrup and Darrang should protest vigorously against such arbitrary assessment. Thus a series of Raij-Mels were held in every nook and corner of all these districts in order to organise the people against alien authoritarianism. The Demonstrations of the people at places like Rangiya, Lachima, Patidarrang, Nalbari, Baroma, Bazali and the Mauzas of Upper Barbhag and Sarukhetri and Patharughat and their determination not to pay the enhanced revenue at any cost alarmed the authorities and they used force to suppress these popular uprisings which the Britishers called 'riots'. In December, 1893 and January 1894, demonstrations were held at Rangiya in the Kamrup District for several days by thousands of persons. On the 10th January 1894, Deputy Commissioner McCabe failing to dispers the

demonstrators by other means, ordered the military to open fire. The crowd ultimately dispersed. On the 21st January at Lachima some peasants assaulted the Mauzadar and the Mandal when the latter tried to collect some revenue. The Sub-Divisional Officer, who was present on the spot, arrested some 75 men in this connection only to be released when more than 3,000 people surrounded the camp and threatened to burn the Rest-house. By the 25th January some 59 of the principal leaders were arrested. At once a crowd of 6000 men assembled and demanded the release of the prisoners. Fearing that the Camp might be stormed, the Deputy Commissioner ordered his men to charge the crowd with fixed bayonets. After some tussle the crowd dispersed. People still remember the barbarity with which the authorities here sought to cowdown the people. There was a similar affray at Patharughat on the 28th January, 1894. The people assembled on the 28th, learning that the Deputy Commissioner would be coming, and might be induced to give them redress. Seeing the assembled crowd in the vast field near the Rest-house, where the Deputy Commissioner camped, he asked them to disperse. The people remained firm and refused to budge an inch unless their demands were conceded. Mr. Berington, the then Superintendent of Police, was then ordered to disperse them by force. The people became excited at the sight of the fixed bayonets when Mr. Berington drew up his men in battle order. The crowd pressed forward inspite of volleys of fire aimed at them and drew back only when scores of people lay dead or injured on the ground. The risings of 1893-94 caused a deep

stir throughout the Province and had their echo even in the Imperial Legislative Council of those days where Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh, in a series of questions, questioned the propriety of the enhanced assessment of revenue in Assam and the measures adopted by the local authorities to suppress the popular risings. The Government had to give vague replies. Though such uprisings were suppressed to some extent by force, but these movements continued to be directed mainly against the oppression and injustice, meted out by the landlords.

The system failed to improve the lots of the tenants or under-tenants as was contemplated by the Government.[5] The Mouzadars failed to carry out works of public utility, viz. construction of roads, establishment of schools, digging of ponds and the like which they were expected to execute under the Mauzadari System. Majority of the Mauzadars lacked in efficiency and ability. By making Mauzadars hereditary, not only did the tenants not get any benefit, but even the Government had to face many difficulties in realising full revenue in time due to the unscrupulous character of the mouzadars. Even though the mouzadars had to pay stipulated amount to the Government and could not realise more than the fixed rent from the ryots, sometimes they even collected double the amount of actual rent from the ryots.[6]

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5. Sadiniya Assamiya (Weekly), Friday, 30th Asvin 1841, 17th October, 1919, Dibrugar, p.6.

6. Sadiniya Assamiya (weekly), Friday, 30th Asvin 1841, 17th October, 1919, Dibrugarh p.6.

Due to the powers vested in them .

As these grievances of the ryots against Mouzadars were not redressed, they organised during 1930-31 a central organisation of the ryots called Assam Talatiya Ryot Sabha. The General Secretary of this Sabha was late Ganga Ram Choudhury. Many incidents regarding the oppression by the Mouzadars are found mentioned in his Diary. From this Diary and the contemporary Newspapers referred to above a vivid picture of the various oppressive acts of the Mouzadars against their ryots come to light. Some of these are:- (1) non-issuing of rent receipts by the Mouzadars, (2) non-specifying areas of land in the Rent receipt, if issued, (3) seiging the crop from paddy field and other movables on some pretext, etc.

These oppressive measures of the Mouzadars made their ryots to unite against them through the Ryot-Sabhas in various parts of the Province. Notable among these were:- (1) Talatiya Ryot Sabha of Geriki gaon of Darrang, (2) Sialmarigaon Ryot Sabha of Nambarbhag Mouza, (3) Namati Mouza Talatiya Ryot Sabha, (4) Darrang Talatiya Ryot Sabha, (5) Golaghat Ryot Sabha, (6) Dhekiakhowa Ryot Sabha, (7) Mangaldai Talatiya Ryot Sabha and (8) Chachani Mouza Ryot Sabha. All these Sabhas functioned under the Central body Assam Talatiya Ryot Sabha.

As a result of this movement the Government was compelled to introduce a bill in the Provincial Council.

The first proposal for introduction of the Assam Tenancy Act was moved in the Council by late Ruhini Kumar Ghoudhury, a member of the Council, as early as 1933 and he was supported by a few other members. The proposal was accepted and subsequently a bill was prepared. This bill was further amended as in view of the opinion of some of the Members of the Council. A fresh bill was introduced in its September (1934) Session. In the first bill there were 85 sections in 12 chapters covering 16 pages. But in the Second there were 123 Sections in 14 chapters covering 42 pages.[7]

The Executive Members of the All Assam Talatiya Ryot Sabha, in their meeting held on 16th January 1934 at Bazali had passed a resolution asking all the members of the Council to protect the rights of the ryots when the bill would be introduced in the Council in its March (1934) Session.[8] Another meeting of this body was held on 4th September, 1934 when a fresh bill in this regard was introduced in the Council. This time again resolutions were passed asking the Members of the Council to endeavour to have the Tenancy Bill passed.[9] The bill sent to a Select Committee in 1934 and published for public opinion. Some landholders of Kamrup District formed an Association called the 'Kamrup Landholders' Association' with the aim of opposing the

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7. Tinidiniya Assamiya of 4th December, 1934.

8. Tinidiniya Assamiya, 2nd February, 1934.

9. Tinidiniya Assamiya of 1st Asvin 1856: 18th September, 1934, p.3.

Tenancy Bill. It was formed on 20th January 1935 in their meeting held in the Sanatan Dharmi Sabha Mandir. The meeting was presided over by Rai Bahadur Kalicharan Sen. By the Resolution No.6 passed at the meeting a Sub-Committee was formed to oppose the Tenancy Bill.[10] Efforts were made to influence the Members of the Council. Landholders of other Districts joined them. In an article written by the late Ganga Ram Choudhury, the General Secretary of the Assam Talatiya Ryot Sabha, he tried to prove the baselessness of the apprehensions which the 'Landholders' Association' put forward against the bill.[11] Since the publication of the Tenancy Bill, series of meetings of all the branches of the Assam Talatiya Ryot Sabha and its Central body were held and in every meeting resolutions were passed asking the Government to pass the bill and requesting the Members of the Council to do their best so that the bill might become an Act.[12] The bill was discussed in the Meetings of the Council held on 6th-7th June, 1935 when it was formally passed and became an Act, under the title of Assam Tenancy Act 1935.[13] Its jurisdiction extended over the Districts of Nowgong, Darrang, Lakshimpur, Sibsagar, Cachar and Kamrup.

The credit for the passing of the bill goes also to the then Governor of Assam Sir Michael Keane. The Act provides for checking the landholders from (1) collecting

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10. Tinidiniya Assamiya, 29th January, 1935.

11. Tinidiniya Assamiya of 26th February, 1935.

12. Tinidiniya Assamiya of 1st and 22nd February, 10th and 21st May, 1935.

13. Tinidiniya Assamiya of 11th and 14th June, 1935.

urdue rent by just showing notice of eviction, (2) evicting any ryot without any cause, (3) realising Sevakar and Mukhchawani, (4) taking cows, used in ploughing, from cow shed by force, (5) issuing illegible rent receipts, (6) collecting rent without issuing rent receipts and for waste land and ~~xxx~~ (7) preventing the ryots in digging ponds for drinking water. As the Act provides also for protection of the rights of the ryots, at least to some extent, it can rightly be said that it marked a new beginning in the history of the system of land tenure in Assam, and consequently it served as the forerunner ~~xxxxxxxxx~~ of some other future Acts of the same nature with such advantageous clauses for the ryots.

SOURCE MATERIALS ON THE AGRARIAN MOVEMENT IN MALABAR (1857-1947)

P.V. Balakrishnan, Chirakkal

The conditions in Malabar at the time it fell into the hands of the British are well narrated by C.A. Innes, in his Malabar and Anjengo, Madras District Gazetteer Series kept in the Madras Archives. He has stated that the religious persecutions by the Mysorean Conquerors during 1766-1793 engendered a fierce and abiding hatred between Hindu and Muhammedan communities in South Malabar. The Brahman and Nayar landlords took refuge in Travancore during the invasion and in their place the Muhammadans tilled the land and enjoyed the fruits of their labour. On their return, these landlords began to oust the tenants from their holdings. This was the reason for the Mappilla outrages which wrecked the peace of Malabar during the latter half of the Nineteenth century. The Government of Madras passed the Mappila Acts of 1854, 1856, and 1859 to contain these disturbances (Madras Archives). According to these Acts the possession of war knife was made illegal and the Mappila population of villages implicated in outrages was fined.

Inspite of the measures taken by the Government to contain the outrages, disturbances continued. William Logan, Collector of Malabar, who wrote about Malabar, refers to the situation in his Manual of Malabar (Kozhikode Archives) which is a decription of the district by the author from his personal experience and contacts. On the 14th October, 1880 the Government received an anonymous petition asking them to redress

the grievances of the Mappillas. As a result of this on the 5th February 1881, William Logan, was appointed Commissioner to inquire into land tenures and tenant rights in Malabar. The suggestions of Logan that the Mappilla outrages were part of a peasant revolt in Malabar have been quoted by C A.Innes in Malabar Gazetteer, P 86. Logan's proposals took concrete shape in the Malabar Compensation for Tenants' Improvements Act, (Act I of 1887) (Madras Archives).

Sri A.K. Gopalan, in his History of Indian Peasant Movement (Malayalam) published in 1961 by the Deshabhimani Printing and Publishing House Ltd., Calicut, has opined that the longest peasant struggle during the 19th century which gave brave resistance to the British Army was the Mappills outbreaks in Malabar. He has accordingly opined that the Agrarian Movement in Malabar was Revolutionary based on the active participation of the masses. It was a struggle by the farmers for land and food and is known as the "North Malabar Struggle". Muhammad Abdurahiman also subscribes to the same view that the Mappilla outbreaks were a peasant revolt against the landlords who happened to be Hindus. This has been made clear in his Dissenting Minute, in the Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee, 1940 (Vol.I) printed by the Superintendent, Government Press, Madras.

The peasant Movement in North Malabar was part of the national movement for freedom. A number of young men took part in the Civil Disobedience Movement during 1930-32 and courted arrest. After their release from jails they took active part in the movement for the amelioration of the sufferings of peasants in North Malabar. The Congress movement had begun to

spread in this part of the country. The Congress Session at Lucknow in 1936 convened the All-India Kisan Sabha. Sri A.K. Poduval in the History of Peasant Movement in Kerala (Malayalam) states that in July 1936 a Hunger March was organized from Malabar to Madras under the leadership of Sri. A.K. Gopalan. Sri A.K. Poduval was a pioneer of the peasant Movement in Malabar and his book has been printed at the District Co-operative Press, Trichur. He is now the president of the Taliparamba Panchayat. He has preserved many of the material which were proscribed by the Government in 1930 and after. In the Hunger March there were 32 members and it included veteran Kisan leaders like Sri K.P.R. Gopalan, Sardar Chandroth Kunhi Raman Nair, and Sri M.K.Kelu. This famous Hunger March from Malabar covered a distance of more than 1,500 miles in two months but the Government met the marchers with force.

Sri C.Achutha Menon, the present Chief Minister of Kerala, has analysed the peasant Movement in Kerala very comprehensively in his work Kisan Pataousthakam (Malayalam) published by Books International, High Road, Trichur. Sri Achutha Menon has stated that the sincere participation of Congress workers in the peasant movement paved the way for the formation of the All Malabar Peasants' Union in 1937. The first President of this organisation was Sri. P. Narayanan Nair and its secretary Sri K.A. Keraliyan. This Union agitated for tenancy Reform and consequently a committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Sri. K.Kuttikrishna Menon, Advocate General, to go into the Tenancy Reform in Malabar. This Committee was appointed by Government Order No. P 1666, Revenue, Madras Government,

dated 5th July 1939, which is kept in the Madras Archives. The Report of the Malabar Tenancy Committee is a valuable treatise on the history of Tenancy in Malabar and the impact of peasants' agitation over the reforms from time to time. This Report has been printed by the Superintendent, Government Press Madras in 1940 and is available at the Madras Archives. E.M.S. Nambudiripad in his Dissenting Minute to the Report laid bare the atrocities of landlordism and the consequent plight of the poor peasants and asked the Government to end landlordism without any compensation. This Dissenting Minute has been considered to be an important and valuable historical document.

Even before the formation of the All-Malabar Peasants' Union in 1937 Taluk-wise Unions of farmers known as Kisan Sanghs were functioning in North Malabar. The First Taluk Kisan Sangh Conference was held in Parassinikadavu in 1936. Reports and Resolutions of these conferences were considered as seditious and these have been always kept secret by the peasant leaders and workers. These Reports and Resolutions of the Kisan Conferences in the form of pamphlets are with Sri A.K. Poduval of Taliparamba. They convey the details of the day to day working of the Kisan Sangh. As the activities of the Sangh were viewed by the Government with suspicion and as they were always ready to swoop down on the Sangh, the Sangh carried on its activities secretly and without much publicity. Yet the Sangh reached every farmer in every village. These records now are with Sri. A.K. Poduwal as well as with Sri A.K. Keraliyan of Calicut. Preservation of these minute details on the working of the Sanghs is highly essential as there are not many copies extant.

The end of 1939 saw the beginning of the Second World War, the prices went high and dissatisfaction among the people began to mount up. The Government took repressive measures against mass movements of peasants. At this time the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee appealed to the people to observe 15th September 1940 as Protest Day. There were clashes between people and the police. In Morazha a Sub-Inspector was murdered. The Fifth Annual Report of the Kasargod Kisan Sangh (Malayalam) refers to the incidents at Kayyur where the peasants stoned to death a policeman. Four peasants were sentenced and hanged to death on 29-3-43. This was the first time that peasants became martyrs at the altar of Kisan Movement and hence the All-India Kisan Sabha decided to observe this day as All India Kisan Day, which until then was observed on 1st September. Indulal Yagnik, Presiding over the 11th All India Kisan Sabha Conference on 13-3-1952 declared in his address that Kayyur would even ramain in the heart of Indian Peasants and in the pages of the History of Indian Peasant Movement. His Presidential address has been published by Desabhimani Printing Press, Calicut.

Kerala is today the only state where Landlordism has become something of the past. The Tenant has become the owner of the land and there is not a trace of the landlord anywhere. This revolutionary change has taken place because of the mass movement by the peasantry in Malabar. The various Tenancy Acts passed by the Kerala Legislature and their Minutes kept in the Kerala Legislative Assembly Library speak voluminously about the progressive changes that have been brought about in Malabar and other parts of Kerala.

THE PEASANTS' RIOTS OF 1875, AND THE DECCAN AGRICULTURISTS' RELIEF ACT 1879

(A Note on Some Sources)

Anil Samarth, Santiniketan

The year 1875 witnessed a violent erruption in the rural society of the Deccan. The redistribution of the power, after the British conquest of the Maratha territory created tension between the peasantry and the petty trading community of the rural area. The enhanced prestige in the socio-economic life of village - of this petty trading community which used to carry on the moneylening business also and which used to be referred to as Vanis, or banias or Marwadis, was supposed to be the major cause of the Deccan Riots. These riots drew the compulsive attention of the Government to the grievances of the wet-feet and led to the passing of the Act of 1879. Thus the agrarian riots of 1875 and the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879 (Act XVII of 1879) are of great importance in the history of the peasants movements in India.

This paper is in no way an attempt to analyse the various aspects of the riots and the said Act, and least to draw any conclusions. It only attempts to highlight some of the sources which throw a flood of light on all dimensions of the subject. Some facts and comments are quoted from some of the sources, so as to illustrate the importance of these sources For the sake of convenience we may examine the sources under two heads - (A) Official Sources, i.e., the sources that represent the view of the concerned Government officials, (B) Native Sources, i.e., the sources that speak of

the view point of the natives. The subject under review can be divided into two parts: (I) Causes and the nature of the riots, (II) the view or the policy that led to the enactment of the said Act, and the public criticism thereof.

(A) OFFICIAL SOURCES

(I) Causes and Nature of the Riots: The Deccan Riots can well be regarded as an uprising of the debtors against the money-lenders. It would be erronious to assume that the Government was unaware of the forces that brought about the uprising. Besides the distinct warnings of Sir George Wingate in 1852 and Mr. Inverarity in 1858, the Police Reports speak with no uncertain tone about the causes.[1] It had been asserted that 'had it not been for a transient period of prosperity, the crisis which has occurred would have happened long ago.'[2] The affected districts were poor and in places sterile. The ryots, themselves a hardworking and docile race had for long xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx remained under a heavy load of ancestral debt, which was one of the causes of their perpetual poverty. This poverty so often took the peasants to the money-lenders and added to their debt. In addition to all this, there was betrayal of the rains. According to

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1. Deccan Riots Commission, Minutes by J.R.Richey, C.W. Carpenter, A.Lyon and Shambhoo Prasad Laxmeelal, Bombay 1876, pp.3-4.

2. E.W.Ravenscroff, Chief Secretary to Government of Bombay, Revenue Department, 6 April 1877, Home, Legislative Department A, December 1879, pp.1-54.

the new system, the land revenue was to be paid at fixed times and in fixed sums in cash. This was a tough task for the pennyless tillers of the soil. As a consequence of all these adverse circumstances the riots commenced on 12 May 1875 The object was, in every case, to obtain by force and destroy loan bonds executed by the cultivators with the money lenders. The riots took place in 11 villages of the Poona and in 22 villages of the Ahmednagar Collectorates. The outbreak was over in about a month. The number of persons arrested was 951, of whom 501 were convicted.[3]

There is a plethora of correspondence between the Government officials, and their Minutes and Reports which deal with the causes and nature of the riots. One such important official source is the 'The Deccan Riots Commission, Minutes by J.B.Richey, C.W. Carpenter, A. Lyon and Shambhoo Prasad Laxmeelal' (printed at Government Press, Bombay, 1876). This Report (213 pages) also contains the extracts from the letters from Sub-Judges, Assistant Collectors, Collectors, Revenue-Commissioners, and Settlement Commissioners of Poona, Ahmednagar and Sholapur districts. These Minutes and Notes give a detailed account about the economic aspect of the problem. For example, in his Minute, Shambhoo Prasad Laxmeelal maintained that, "In the Broach Collectorate, say, a ryot possessing 10 acres of land has a net income of Rs.200, after paying the Government assessment, say, Rs.40; while in the Poona and Ahmednagar Collectorates a cultivator, having the

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3. E.W. Ravenscroff, Chief Secretary to Government of Bombay, Revenue Department, 6 April 1877, Home, Legislative Department A, December 1879, 1-54.

same extent of land, would only save Rs.25, after payment of assessment, say Rs.5. Suppose, then, the debt of both the ryots commences to increase, on the amount of bonds of equal principal, since the new limitation came in force. The ryot who saves yearly Rs.25 will not lose credit till the principal amounts to a sum the annual interest of which will be Rs.25, while the other to a sum the interest of which will be Rs.200 . Thus in the second case the time for losing credit will be eight times of the first case, though the principal at the commencement in both was equal."[4]

(II) The Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act, 1879: The policy of the Government that led to the enactment of the said Act can be read in a Minute of 30 August 1878, by Richard Temple, Governor of Bombay. The intention of the Act, he tells us, was:-

"To make it illegal to award compound interest or more interest than the amount of the principal found to be due.

To limit the liability of a ryot for debts incurred by his ancestors, etc."[5]

Most of these Notes, Minutes and letters are available in the National Archives of India. They can be found in the series of the Judicial and Legislative Departments. To mention but a few files -

1. Legislative Department, B, Oct. 1875, 32 to 55
2. -do- A, Dec. 1879, 1 to 54.

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4. Deccan Riots Commission, Op.Cit., P.18.
5. Legislative Department, A, Proceedings Dec. 1879, 1-54.

3. Home Judicial Department, A, Jan. 1876, 15 to 17.
4. -do- A, Apl. 1879, 3 to 3?.
5. -do- A, Aug. 1879, 91 to 113.
6. -do- B, Oct. 1879, 12, to 137.
7. -do- B, Nov. 1879, 1 to 54.

All these files constitute very important source to know about the view-point of the Government. The number of such extremely important files, from which some are mentioned above, is quite considerable and one cannot afford to neglect them. The text of the Act, along with its amendments in 1881 (by the Act XXIII of 1881) and in 1882 (by the Act XXII of 1882 is to be found in 'A Collection of the Acts passed by the Governor General of India in Council in the year 1879" (pp.348-84), published at Calcutta in 1880. This is also available in the National Archives.

The Maharashtra State Archives also has a number of records which can be profitably used for the study of the subject under review. The Proceedings of the Revenue and Judicial Departments (1875 to 1879) are full of information. The Peshwa Daftar, at Poona, has a number of files under the heading 'The Deccan Commissioners' files'. It contains the administrative and judicial records. In addition to these archival sources, some of the Government publications are of vital importance. They are as follows:-

1. Papers relating to the Deccan Agriculturists' Relief Act of 1879, 2 Volumes, Selections from the Records of the Government of India, Home Department, No.342. Published by the Government of India.

2. Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, No.4: Report on the Village Communities of the Deccan, by N.R.Goodine, (Published by the Government of Bombay).

3. Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, New Series, No.47: Papers relating to the Deccan Agriculturists' Act of 1879. (Published by the Government of Bombay).

4. Selections from the Records of the Bombay Government, New Series, No.151: Report by Col. J. Francis on the Taluka of Indopur. (Published by the Government of Bombay).

5. Report of the Committee on the Riots in Poona and Ahmednagar, 1875, 2 Volumes. (Published by Government of Bombay, 1876).

6. Source Material for a History of the Freedom Movement in India, Volume, I, 1881-1885. Published by the Government of Maharashtra, 1957.

(B) NATIVE SOURCES

A vocal class of the nation, however 'microscopic-minority' in number, had come into existence even before 1875. This class had begun to take keen interest in the affairs of the country. It had also laid a claim of representing the aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears of the 'voiceless-millions' of India. Though this loud claim was always challenged by the imperial-masters, there can be no dispute over the subtle role of this class as a catalytic agent in the political evolution of India. By constant efforts this class made its existence felt through the newspapers, memorials and petitions. Their views and opinions are certainly of much

importance for a critical study of the subject under review. xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx Some of the available native sources would convince us that the British view on the subject was one-sides.

(I) Causes and Nature of the Riots:- The most leading Anglo-Marathi Weekly of Bombay, the Indu Prakash (12 July 1875), while commenting upon the riots asserted that, "The dealings between the ryots and the money-lenders are not of today's origin. The change in the Government's policy is the most important cause.... The assessment, the ryots are to pay under the English Government is much larger than they used to pay under the old indigenous xxxxxxxxx rulers."[6] Another Anglo-Marathi Weekly of Satara, the Maharashtra Mitra (10 June 1875) tracing the cause of the riots said that, "The Government has enormously enhanced the rates of assessment on land, lessened the number of instalments in which the assessment is to be paid, and fixed the days of the payment of the instalments earlier."[7] The peasantry of Ratnagiri had also registered their resentment through a communication to the Anglo-Marathi bi-weekly of Poona, the Duyan Prakash (13 January 1875). They complained that, "in addition to the land tax a duty of eight annas is charged for every coconut tree, whether toddy is drawn from it or not."[8] Thus, these newspapers put the blame on the Government for the excess assessment. These newspapers also gave an account of the disturbances. The Indu Prakash,

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6. Report on the Native Newspaper of Bombay Presidency, January-June 1875, P.43.
7. Report on the Native Newspaper of Bombay Presidency, January-June 1875, P. 517.
8. Ibid., P.29.

(7 June 1875), tells us that, "The wrath of the disturbers is directed only against the money-lenders, the village-Marwaris. They do not molest or injure any other people whatever... Th put (the riots) down not only the police but even the military aid is required."[9]

The riots were thoroughly discussed in the native newspapers and this becomes evident from the titles of some of the articles - The Indu Prakash (12 July 1875) contained an article headed as, "The Agrarian Riots."[10] The Shubha Suchak, a Marathi Weekly of Satara, on 16 July, 1875 questioned "Is Government still asleep?"[11] Another Marathi Weekly of Poona, the Shiwaji, came out on 1 October 1875 with the headline, "What has led the Agricultural classes to attack and plunder their creditor?"[12] The native press had offered many suggestions in regard to the enquiry by the Commission. Thus, the famous Gujarati Weekly of Bombay, the Rasta Goftar, brought out a long leader on 22 August 1875, with the title "The Proposed Commission on the Poona Riots." It criticised the Government for not accepting the help offered by the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha.[13] The Indu Prakash also pleaded on 30 August 1875 for the inclusion of some native gentlemen in the said Commission.[14]

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9. Ibid., P.487
10. Ibid. (July-December) Vol., P.43.
11. Ibid., P.67.
12. Ibid., P.303.
13. Report on the Native Newspaper of Bombay Presidency, July-December, Vol., P.183.
14. Ibid., P. 195.

II. The Deccan Agriculturists' Act, 1879: The causes and effects of the poverty of the peasantry, the bitter criticism of the Governmental policies, that appeared in the native newspapers had strong support of a public body like the Sarvajanik Sabha of Poona. When the Act was on the table of the Council, the native press discussed it thread bare. One of the Gujarathi Weeklies of Surat, the Gujarat Mitra, vehemently attacked the Government on 29 December 1879, in its editorial entitled, "The Bill for the improvement of the condition of the cultivators."[15] One can hardly come across a newspaper of the Bombay presidency, during the period under review, which did not comment upon the Act. The Poona Sarvajanik Sabha also had sent their views and suggestions to the Government on 6 September 1879. The Sabha had made it emphatically clear that, "the proposed reforms will not secure any real relief, unless they are accompanied by a change in the system of revenue settlement."[16] There were some persons who in their private capacity had sent memorials to the Government. One Byramjee Jeejeebhoy of Bombay sent a Memorial to the Viceroy on 2 October 1879 wherein he prayed "for the exclusion of suits involving issues of the nature of mortgages from the summary jurisdiction of Subordinate Judges, leaving them to be dealt with, according to the provisions of the Code of Civil Procedure."[17]

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15. Ibid., January-July 1879, P.9.
16. Home, Judicial Department, B, October, 1879, 129-137.
17. Home, Judicial Department, B, October 1879, 267-269.

Prior to this, one Eshvant Sridhar of Poona had offered 21 suggestions to the Government of India, in regard to the revenue administration of the villages. In his Memorial dated 17 August 1879, he proposed :- "(1) That a man of some position and education, from among the villagers should be appointed to the Khoti of one or more villages. (2) That he be allowed to advance money to the raits on a small interest to be laid down by Government."[18]

Thus, there exist a number of sources that speak of the opinion of the people. Among them all the Reports on the Natives Newspapers of Bombay Presidency (1875 to 1879) are of prime importance. They are available in the National Archives of India. They contain the English summary of several vernacular newspapers. Though these summaries are made by the expert oriental translators, it must not be forgotten that they were challenged by some of the vernacular newspapers. The Hithechchhu of Ahmedabad, 3 July, 1879; the Shivaji of Poona, 27 June, 1879; the Lok-Mitra of Bombay, 24 June, 1879 and the Broach Samachar of Broach, 28 June, 1879, openly challenged the accuracy of the English summaries made by the Government translators.[19] The validity of this challenge is a subject matter for a thorough investigation into the facts.

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18. Ibid., September 1879, 208-213.

19. Report on Native Newspapers, Bombay Presidency, July-December 1879, P.11.

Besides these Reports on the Native Newspapers, one may consult some of the newspapers which are available in the Maharashtra State Archives which has about 1,000 files of old newspapers.[20] These Reports on Native Newspapers of Bombay Presidency tell us that in 1879, there existed -

1.	Anglo-Marathi - Weeklies and Bi-weeklies	-	10
2.	Anglo-Gujarati - -do-	-	32
3.	Marathi -do-	-	32
4.	Gujarati -do-	-	28
5.	Canarese -do-	-	1
6.	Hindustani -do-	-	1
7.	Persian -do-	-	1

The circulation of these papers ranged from 1,650 (the Rast-Goftar) to 100 (the Broach Wartaman). Though these papers were run by the educated, middle-class people, usually dwelling in the urban area, they certainly contain the communications either from their correspondents in the rural areas or from some individual - often a sufferer - from some villages. It is true that in the then India the tiller of the soil was not in a position to pen out his grievances. Yet, one must admit that he might have been voiceless but he was certainly not without opinion. One of the ways to know this opinion is to make a careful approach through the vernacular writings, the writers of which lived amongst the peasantry.

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20. V.G.Khobrekar, - "The Bombay Archives", The Indian Archives, Vol. XX, No.1 (January-June 1971), P. 46.

the quarterly journal of the Poona Sarvajanik Sabha (the issues of 1879), which contain the papers relating to the riots; and the papers relating to the activities of the Sabha also constitute a source of information. The Marathi biographies like - (1) A.K. Priyolkar, : "Doctor Bhau Daji", Bombay, 1971, and (2) N.R.Phatak, : "Nyaymurti Mahadev Govind Ranade", Poona, 2nd enlarged edition, 1966, throw light on the period under review and thereby enable us to understand the subject in a wider perspective. In short, the Native sources would enable us to understand, first, the ways and means of the socio-political awakening of the Deccan peasantry, and secondly, the interest and motives of the white-collar-class It may be said in conclusion that the critical analysis of the official British sources as well as the non-official Native sources would help us in drawing important conclusions.

21. N.R. Phatak, vide, Pp.144-45.